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ABSTRACT

There is question as to the relevance and effectiveness of education that American Indians receive via the present non-Indian American educational system. If the system is irrelevant and ineffective, ways must be tried to discover alternative plans, systems, and processes in Indian education. As part of the process of trying to discover alternatives in Indian education, it is suggested that projects combining research and demonstration be developed to explore the Indian value system, the Indian culture, and Indian parent participation. A research and demonstration project involving 12 institutions of higher learning in the Southwest is thus suggested; this project should have a strong research component to which the policy makers, administrators, faculties, Indian students, and Indian parents are fully committed. The demonstration aspect of the suggested project should be designed and developed strictly by the participating institutions of higher education, but the development and implementation should be dominated by Indian students and parents. The students and parents should develop a 4-year curriculum which is indigenous to the Indian student and his community. The curriculum should be developed and built upon the Indian value system, Indian culture, and Indian life style. This should result in innovations which are relevant to the Indian educational system. (LS)

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SUGGESTED RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT NEEDS AND PRIORITIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION FOR AMERICAN INDIANS

A Position Paper
Submitted to
Southwestern Cooperative Educational Laboratory

By
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SUGGESTED RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT NEEDS AND PRIORITIES FOR THE EDUCATION OF AMERICAN INDIANS

We have assumed too long that by offering the Indians the non-Indian American educational system, with its built-in reflection of the values of the non-Indian dominant culture, these non-Indian values would motivate the Indian student to the perceived desirable goals of the dominant culture, namely, upward social mobility.

The fact that the national Indian dropout rate is 60 per cent would seem to indicate that Indian students are (a) not responding to the system of rewards and punishments in the non-Indian culture, and (b) that their cultural needs are not being met.

—John F. Bryde, Ph. D.*

The Nature and Scope of the Problem

Indian education is the worst of any minority group. The Indian completes about five years of schooling and all other Americans average 11.2 years. It is not only the quantity of education the Indian is deprived of but the quality, for the saddest fact of all is that the longer he stays in school, the farther behind his achievement falls in comparison with white children.

BIA schools were established as a means of bringing about the rapid assimilation of the American Indian into the dominant

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*"A Rationale for Indian Education", Journal of American Indian Education, January, 1969, Vol. VIII, No. 2.

society. Some of the first techniques enforced were: (1) putting children away from home in boarding schools, (2) teaching the adults farming, and (3) Christianizing the young as well as the old. No thought was given to the wide difference in the ways and styles of life that tribes have developed in their various natural environment. No attention was given to the family and tribal customs of child training directed to young boys and girls in becoming Navajo, Apache, Pima, Papago, or members of other tribal groups and to retaining native customs, ideas, or personality types.

As a result, education did not bring about assimilation and the elimination of Indian life as anticipated. Some acceptance of various aspects of the imposed life did occur and continues. But the holding to many Indian ways and striving to maintain Indian identification and attitudes also goes on.

Today the American Indian student faces a world that is strange and hard to figure out. He is caught between two contrasting cultures.

Because of the demand for responsible, creative, and effective leadership on the reservations and Indian communities in non-reservation settings, and increased educational opportunities, the American Indian is attending institutions of higher education in rapidly increasing numbers. However, the new Indian college student is placed in a vital and difficult role. Yet, in spite

of this great need and demand for properly educated Indians and the mounting higher education opportunities for Indians, very little research has been conducted in this area.

Current Status of Research on the Problem

The number of American Indians who are in higher education is not known. A more important fact is that nothing is known about the areas of difficulty these American Indians in higher education are encountering. Further, it is not known whether the problems encountered are qualitatively and/or quantitatively different from those experienced by non-Indians. The factors which are related to the Indian's success or failure are not identified. What is the impact of special programs to help Indian students adapt to college life and/or the establishment of Indian studies departments? There is need to have fundamental answers based on research rather than on unfounded feelings and impressions.

The critical need is not pure research, but a demonstration and development project with a built-in research component. The American Indian has been over-studied. Another research project can be justified only with an action program primarily designed, developed, and implemented to meet the current needs of Indian students in colleges and universities. However, one of the priority activities in the action program would be evaluative

research. To date there has been no demonstration and development research conducted in the United States which focuses on the need and problem of the American Indian in institutions of higher learning.

Needed Additional And New Knowledge

It has never occurred to educators and researchers that possibly some of the reasons of the Indian student's difficulties and failure in college can be attributed to the following factors:

1. Indian Value System. The Indian student should be educated first of all in his own value system. A demonstration and research project must test the validity of this assumption. Can the Indian student's difficulties in college be attributed to his being educated via a system which is foreign to his own value system?

2. Indian Culture. The dominant society's educational system originally regarded the cultures of its minority groups to be absolutely inferior. The Indian student was therefore coerced into becoming like the teacher, a White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP). Later the Indian culture was accommodated from a compensatory education point of view and approach. The Indian culture's intrinsic value and worth was really never recognized. It does not stand out in the curriculum as subjects in

western civilization or the geography of Europe. Courses on the cultural heritage of ethnic groups are still considered electives or substitutes to requirements in the curriculum, but not as important and necessary components of general education. Three questions are in order. Is a bi-cultural or multi-cultural approach to education more effective and relevant to the American Indian student? Is the Indian student sincerely accepted by the WASP teacher as a worthwhilte person within the Indian's cultural context and not necessarily within the teacher's cultural context? Could attitudes be changed?

3. Indian Parents. Initially the call for "self-determination" by Indian people meant participation in the existing decision-making structures and processes. The results are spotty and nil. Faced with questionable success in gaining entrance into existing structures, the Indian voices have become more strident and demands less conciliatory. "Maximum feasible participation" is no longer the term used to express self-determination. It is now immediate and total control. Indian parents should control the education of their children and should set their own educational goals for them which meet their cultural needs. There have been successes at the elementary and high school levels. Is this possible at the state university or college level?

In all the areas stated above there is a great need for new and additional knowledge and insight. Indian education would be on the right direction if it begins to address itself to the

potentials within the current higher educational system of the Indian value system, Indian culture, Indian parent in-put or community control, and changed attitudes on the part of the members and perpetuators of the dominant culture.

Recommended Demonstration And Research Project

A demonstration project with a strong research component can be designed, developed, implemented, and evaluated at 12 geographically represented higher institutions of learning in the Southwest. The policy makers, administrators, faculty, Indian students, and Indian parents must be fully committed to the demonstration project and must fully participate in its development and implementation. The research component will have following purposes:

1. To assess the current status of Indians in high education.
2. To determine precisely the Indian students' participation in the educational processes and perception of those processes and the system itself.
3. To learn from the Indian students their ideas and insights on Indian values and Indian culture as a part of the educational processes.
4. To learn from Indian students and Indian parents their opinions and ideas on community control of higher education institutions.

5. To determine precisely what universities and colleges are doing in the areas stated on pages 4 to 6 of this paper, what they plan to do, and what they believe should be done.
6. To identify the reasons for academic and vocational success and failure of Indian college students.
7. To test the attitudes of higher educational institutions: their faculty, administration, and policy makers.

The demonstration aspect of the project will be designed and developed strictly by the participating higher educational institutions, but the development and implementation will be dominated by Indian students and Indian parents. They will come up with a 4-year developmental curriculum which is indigenous to the Indian student and his community. The curriculum will be developed and built upon the Indian value system, Indian culture, and Indian life style. The university or college which would evade or side-track the crucial issue of parental in-put and community control would not be considered. Community control must be considered, developed, and finally incorporated at the decision making level. There can be no compromise if the demonstration and research project is to be effective and successful.

The demonstration project will be highly flexible in order to maximize creativity. But the innovations should re-

sult in an effective and relevant Indian educational system and process.

Conclusion

There is question as to the relevance and effectiveness of educating the American Indians via the present non-Indian American educational system. If it is irrelevant and ineffective, we must try to discover alternative plans, systems, and processes in Indian education. As part of the process of trying to discover alternatives in Indian education, we must test the validity of the assumptions in this paper through a demonstration and research project.